

# Study finds massage helps treat generalized anxiety disorder

August 4 2016, by Robin Reese

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A new study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* finds acute Swedish massage therapy provides significant improvement in symptoms of individuals with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). The article, written by Emory researchers, suggests that a time-limited course of massage may be an effective and reasonable treatment alternative for anxiety and depression symptoms.

The randomized, single blind study compared twice-weekly Swedish massage therapy (SMT) versus light touch over a six-week period for participants with GAD. Therapy sessions lasted 45 minutes under the same room conditions. Patient assessments, self-reported and clinician-rated, were done before the initial session and again after each subsequent session.

This was the first monotherapy study ever done on massage for an anxiety disorder. Researchers found as early as session five that individuals who received SMT showed greater improvement of [anxiety symptoms](#) than those who received [light touch](#). There was also a decrease in [depression symptoms](#) among those who received massage.

"These finding are significant and if replicated in a larger study will have important ramifications for patients and providers," says lead researcher, Mark Hyman Rapaport, MD, Reunette W. Harris professor and chair of Emory's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

Use of massage therapy to treat patients with physical ailments is well

documented and Rapaport suggests that more work is needed to investigate the biology of massage to better understand its possible role in treating a variety of anxiety and mood disorders.

**More information:** Mark Hyman Rapaport et al. Acute Swedish Massage Monotherapy Successfully Remediate Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder, *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* (2016). [DOI: 10.4088/JCP.15m10151](https://doi.org/10.4088/JCP.15m10151)

Provided by Emory University

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